

# Deal to clean up Chicago-area radioactive waste

## The nation's biggest settlement for environmental contamination sets aside \$121 million for Chicago and \$9 million for West Chicago

April 05, 2014|By Michael Hawthorne, Tribune reporters



Environmental workers cleanup a 3.5 acre site at the mouth of the Chicago River in DuSable Park in 2002. Thorium - a radioactive material linked to cancer - was discovered at the site in 2000. (Milbert O. Brown, Chicago Tribune)

Every time developers dig up a patch of Chicago's Streeterville neighborhood to build hotels or high-rise condominiums, the soil must be tested for radioactive thorium dumped years ago at several sites near the Chicago River.

Tons of contaminated soil have been removed in recent years as the neighborhood undergoes a rapid transformation from its industrial past. Now the city and the federal government have a new source of funding to ensure taxpayers aren't stuck with the bill.

A \$5.15 billion legal settlement announced this week by the Justice Department and Environmental Protection Agency includes about \$121 million for thorium removal work in Streeterville and \$9 million to help finish the cleanup of contaminated sites in suburban West Chicago.

The radioactive waste was dumped decades ago by the Lindsey Light and Chemical Co., which used thorium to produce gas lantern mantels at a long-forgotten Chicago factory. The company moved to West Chicago in the 1930s, changed hands several times and ended up as part of Kerr-McGee Corp., which was cited last year by a federal bankruptcy judge for fraudulently shifting its massive environmental liabilities to a separate company.

The current parent company of Kerr-McGee, Anadarko Petroleum Corp., agreed to pay the nation's largest settlement for environmental contamination to address the two Chicago-

area sites and dozens of others nationwide. Some of the money will be used to reimburse federal, state and local agencies that collectively have spent billions cleaning up the waste.

"This is a very, very significant case," said Susan Hedman, the EPA's regional administrator. "The EPA and Justice Department were very focused to ensure the principle that the polluter pays was upheld in court."

Money to be set aside for Chicago includes \$67 million to address thorium contamination as it is discovered in Streeterville and an additional \$45 million to remove radioactive waste found during street work.

The Chicago Park District will get about \$6.7 million to finish the cleanup of a tainted site where the Chicago River meets Lake Michigan. City planners want to turn the 3.5-acre site into a park dedicated to Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, the city's first non-native settler.

Nearly \$750 million has been spent cleaning up thorium contamination in West Chicago, according to the EPA. Earlier legal settlements helped fund much of that work.